



February 13, 2003

WALSH / HINCHEY INTRODUCE NEW LEGISLATION PERMANENTLY BANNING FINGER LAKES FOREST DRILLING

Washington, D.C. – New York Congressmen Jim Walsh (NY-25) and Maurice Hinchey (NY-22) today introduced new legislation in the 108th Congress to permanently ban drilling in the Finger Lakes National Forest located in Hector, New York. Previously, Walsh and Hinchey have been successful in individual efforts to include language in Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003 Appropriations bills securing one-year bans on drilling in the preserve. In addition, Walsh had introduced legislation in the 107th Congress that would have made the ban permanent.

“Any drilling in the Finger Lakes Forest would have negative effects on wildlife, recreation in the area, and tourism vital to the region’s economy,” said Walsh. “This legislation makes permanent earlier bans to ensure that the land will remain free of development for generations to come.”

“The Finger Lakes National Forest, the only National Forest in New York, is enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors each year,” said Hinchey. “Drilling would have a permanent adverse impact on this precious resource and we cannot allow it to happen. We’ve been successful at staving off efforts at drilling exploration in recent years, but a permanent prohibition is the best way to ensure the protection of this precious resource.”

Walsh and Hinchey noted that the Finger Lakes National Forest is the smallest national forest in the country and draws 46,000 recreational visitors each year who hunt, fish, camp, and hike on the 16,000-plus acre reserve. According to the New York Congressmen, the proposed drilling in the Finger Lakes National Forest, which would utilize 130 foot rigs and pipelines, would cause severe damage to the landscape and environment.

Walsh and Hinchey were joined by twenty-eight fellow Members of Congress in introducing the bipartisan bill, including New York Representatives Sherwood Boehlert, Joseph Crowley, Eliot Engel, Sue Kelly, Carolyn Maloney, Carolyn McCarthy, John McHugh, Michael McNulty, Gregory Meeks, Jerold Nadler, Major Owens, Jack Quinn, Charlie Rangel, Jose Serrano, Louise Slaughter, John Sweeney, Edolphus Towns, and Anthony Weiner. The brief legislation simply states, “No Federal permit or lease shall be issued for oil or gas drilling in the Finger Lakes National Forest in New York.” Walsh and Hinchey said that the ban would not restrict oil and natural gas exploration on private lands throughout the Finger Lakes region.

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FINGER LAKES DRILLING BAN

February 13, 2003

Page Two

As Chairman of the VA/HUD and Independent Agencies Subcommittee, Walsh holds oversight responsibility over the Environmental Protection Agency and has worked over the past several years to direct millions of dollars in watershed protection, conservation, and environmental-related funding to concerns across New York State.

Hinchey, a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittees on Interior and Agriculture, is a former member of the House Resources Committee. He is a leader in the effort to preserve public lands and has made environmental protection a hallmark of his 28-year legislative career.

Walsh's father, former Rep. William F. Walsh, represented the area in Congress in the 1970's and fought hard to ensure this pristine area would be protected for future generations.

Walsh and Hinchey's bill is expected to be immediately referred to the House Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources for review and consideration.